N° VI

THE THEATRICAL

CENSOR.

BY A CITIZEN.

Speech! Is that all?—And shall an actor found
An universal fame on partial ground?
Parrots themselves speak properly by rote;
And, in six months, my dog shall howl by note.

True genius, like Armida's wand,
Can raise the spring from barren land;
While all the art of imitation
Is pilf'ring from the first creation.

LLOYD.

PHILADELPHIA, JAN. 2, 1806.

THE dagger of Melpomene is drawn. The Theatrical Censor is menaced by its empoisoned steel. Every wooden sword has started from its scabbard; the thunder rolls around him, and a fresh cargo of lightning has been subscribed for, to dart destruction at his head.

Never was known a noise of such distraction,
Noise so confus'd and dreadful: justling crowds
That run, and know not whither: torches gliding,
Like meteors, by each other in the streets:

Plangebant alii proceris tympana palmis,
Aut tereti tenues tinnitus ære ciebant:

Fabricando de su desconfianza
Mas determinacion, y mas venganza.

A less determined quill-driver than himself might now shrink from the storm. If he were a poet he might invoke the aid of the Nine, who have long since been turned out of the theatre, and would no doubt gladly lend their efforts to regain their former ascendancy; but the only support he desires is that of the public. For them he labours, in the reform of an amusement which must ever influence the manners of the rising generation, and which, if permitted to proceed in its accustomed track, will soon degenerate to mere fustian and buffoonery. If there were no standard for the English language, he might suffer a vicious pronunciation to pass unnoticed; if the Graces were useless, the barbarous gestures of the performers would by him be disregarded; and if memory were not indispensably necessary to them, their blunders might uninterruptedly mount to the vaulted roof, and thence dissolve to "airy nothing."

The Theatrical Censor has commenced: he will continue. The cabals of party cannot enervate his pen. He will tell the indolent, the neglectful performer of his faults; he will put him in mind that public favor may be extended for a while to ancient remembrances; but that inattention and contempt may soon wither every branch, whose beauty, if it have any, is imparted from the genial soil whereon it is placed, rather than from the peculiar excellence of the plant itself. The Theatrical Censor has no personal acquaintance with any one on the stage. The moment an actor ascends the boards, he is censured or praised in his *assumed* character. "What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?" His first object is to chasten the deformity of action and pronunciation. His next shall be to watch with careful eye the mutilations of an author's text, and hold them up to public view. This Augean stable may be cleared, although the Theatrical Censor is not a Hercules.

The Philadelphia audience is indulgent to a blameable excess. If a performer be possessed of a very moderate share

of talents, his *entrée* is always cheered by their applause, although, in the part he may that evening have undertaken, he deserve every manifestation of disgust. This is considering the *man*, and not the *actor*. And what does this demand in return? Gratitude, humility, and amendment. Let not, then, the visionary determinations of a midnight revel delude our friends of the stage to rely for support on the more visionary aid of a wretched scribbler to defend their faults. Let them rather feel sensible that they are not immaculate, and that the voice of censure is only raised to procure their ultimate success.

Monday Evening, Dec. 23.

THE "GRECIAN DAUGHTER."

Evander, Warren;—*Philotas*, Wood;—*Melancthon*, Rutherford;—*Phocion*, Cain;—*Dionysius*, M'Kenzie;—*Calippus*, Taylor;—*Arcas*, Robbins;—*Greek Herald*, Cross;—*Perdiccas*, Durang;—*Euphrasia*, Mrs. Wignell.

WE had prepared a detailed critique on this tragedy, which our limits will not permit us to insert this week. It shall be reserved for the next representation of the piece, when a little alteration in the *Dramatis Personæ* should take place. Mr. Warren might find it his interest to give the part of *Evander* to Mr. M'Kenzie, whose tremulous accents are not well suited to the part of *Dionysius*, but would better agree with the situation of the oppressed king.

> His voice, in one dull, deep, unvaried sound
> Seems to break forth from caverns under ground.
> From hollow chest the low sepulchral note
> Unwilling heaves, and struggles in the throat.

THE "HUNTER OF THE ALPS"

Was repeated this evening, with less effect than before.

Tuesday Evening, Dec. 24.

"THE HEIR AT LAW."

Daniel Dowlas, Warren;—*Dick Dowlas*, Wood;—*Doctor Panglos*, Harwood;—*Henry Moreland*, Cain;—*Stedfast*, Rutherford;—*Zekiel Homespun*, Jefferson;—*Kenrick*, Blisset;—*Lady Duberly*, Mrs. Morris;—*Caroline Dormer*, Mrs. Jefferson;—*Cicely Homespun*, Mrs. Wood.

THIS Comedy is free from that false morality by which the English Stage is too often disgraced. The newly-exalted *Baron Duberly* and his lady are true pictures of plebeians in high life. *Dick Dowlas* and *Panglos*, although not original, are well-drawn characters; and *Zekiel Homespun* must ever highly interest the feeling heart.

Mr. Wood's performance of *Dick Dowlas* was superior to any thing we have before seen of that gentleman's efforts. He personified admirably the awkward gait of a freshly-made beau; and, by constant grinning, peeping through his glass, playing with his watch-chain, and flourishing every moment an enormous white handkerchief, marked the difference between the behaviour of a well-bred man and a mushroom buck. Nor was his delineation of the tender passion undeserving of our praise. In the scene of reconciliation with *Cicely* he exhibited no small degree of feeling. The conflict between pride and honor was very chastely depicted.

Jefferson displayed the simplicity of a rustic with much more effect than usual. Divesting himself of grimace and threadbare clownish tricks, he seemed to act from the true impulse of Nature. When young *Dowlas*, under the influence of his sudden elevation, disclaims the friendship of *Homespun*, and hints at the seduction of *Cicely*, there never, perhaps, was a more unaffected picture of the multiplied sensations of wounded honor, just resentment, and stifled sorrow, than that displayed by Mr. Jefferson.

Panglos was a well-finished performance. The more we see of Mr. Harwood, the more we lament that he should have appeared, after his long absence from the boards, in the absurd character of *Goldfinch*. Mr. H. has the very commendable practice of attending closely to the business of the scene in which he is engaged. His eyes never wander in vacant gaze from the objects which alone should engage his attention; and he appears to understand completely the nice distinctions of polished society, so necessary to an actor. His *Panglos* is quaint, but never vulgar; he is amusing, but not too ridiculous; and his mode of introducing quotations and "wise saws" is by no means so *outré* as to be unlike many living characters of our own age and country.

"THE VILLAGE LAWYER."

Scout, Jefferson;—*Snarl*, Francis;—*Charles*, Taylor;—*Justice Mittimus*, Bray;—*Sheepface*, Blisset:—*Mrs. Scout*, Mrs. Francis.

This piece was evidently written by some unsuccessful client, smarting under the lash of the law. The illiberal and unnatural sarcasm which it levels against a body of men, who in this country are the chief promoters of literature and the arts, is highly blameable, and destroys the pleasure we should otherwise receive from Jefferson's inimitable personification of *Scout*, and Blisset's truly natural *Sheep-Face*.

The little Dance, entitled "The Sailor's Return from Tripoli," concluded the entertainments of this evening with *éclat*. The pantomimical powers of some of the children are extremely amusing, and prove the exertions of their instructors. Miss Hunt improves much in her dancing, and will soon become, in that line, a great acquisition to our Theatre.

Thursday Evening, Dec. 26.

COLMAN'S "WHO WANTS A GUINEA."

Torrent, Warren;—*Heartly*, Robbins;—*Hogmore*, Bray;—*Solomon Gundy*, Jefferson;—*Barford*, M'Kenzie;—*Jonathan Oldskirt*, Francis;—*Sir Larry M'Murrah*, Rutherford;—*Andrew Bang*, Blisset;—*Henry*, Cain;—*Fanny Delamere*, Mrs. Wood;—*Mrs. Glastonbury*, Mrs. Francis;—*Amy*, Miss Hunt.

The following is a brief sketch of the plot of this comedy.—*Delamere*, an officer of a regiment in the West Indies, marries in that country; and, after spending many happy years under the conjugal yoke, is abandoned by his wife, who carries off with her their own child, a daughter. *Delamere* quits the service in despair, returns to England, and settles at an obscure village in Yorkshire, under the assumed name of *Barford*. His wife, remaining in the islands, soon after repents, and devotes her time to the education of her child. The latter having attained the age of seventeen years, is placed by the mother, on her death-bed, in the care of a young man, named *Henry*, who is enamoured of the young lady, to be conducted to Europe, for the purpose of finding her father. Scarcely are they arrived in England, when *Henry* disappears. *Fanny*, the beautiful orphan, fortunately meets with an old broker, *Jonathan Oldskirt*, who takes upon him the duties of parent, and finds her a situation as housekeeper to a *Mr. Torrent*, in the county of York, where the scene commences. *Torrent's* house is situated near the village in which *Fanny's* father resides; who soon hears of her; and the only obstacle invented by the dramatist to retard the *denouement*, is by the mistake of sending *Fanny* to the country-seat of a fashionable nobleman, instead of to *Torrent's* habitation, where she is exposed to the insolence of a ruined Irish baronet, who has taken refuge from his creditors in this part of the country. The father and daughter, however, at length meet, and *Henry*, who had been pressed into the navy, and taken by the French, suddenly escapes from

his double thraldom, and is thrown by shipwreck on the part of the coast where these interesting scenes are passing. The reader will easily imagine that he is immediately married to the object of his affections, and the whole ends *heureusement*, "as we say at Dunkirk."

The character of *Oldskirt* is original, and diverting; and although the author is blamed for vulgarisms and commonplace *equivoque*, the piece has many beauties. The principal dislike to it, in England, seems to have arisen from the character of *Barford*, which is too closely copied from the "Stranger" of Kotzebue.

The part of *Solomon Gundy* was well supported by Mr. Jefferson, who, we are in great hopes, will, by degrees, correct the faults before pointed out in his action. A constant swinging and twisting of the body must be offensive to every eye, and only becomes the stage of a charlatan.

Blisset wants the Yorkshire dialect to make *Bang* a finished performance, according to the author's intention.

The rest of the characters were generally well sustained.

DON JUAN

this evening was a very flat exhibition. The delightful duet, "Thus for Men the Women fair," &c. was sung in all the sublimity of discord.

Friday Evening, Dec. 27.

SHAKESPEAR'S "MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR."

Sir John Falstaff, Warren;—*Mr. Ford*, Wood;—*Sir Hugh Evans*, Jefferson;—*Doctor Caius*, Blisset;—*Host*, Cross;—*Simple*, Bray;—*Mrs. Ford*, Mrs. Wignell.

"Of this play," says Dr. Johnson, "there is a tradition preserved by Mr. Rowe, that it was written at the command of Queen Elizabeth, who was so delighted with the character of

Falstaff, that she wished it to be diffused through more plays; but suspecting that it might pall by continued uniformity, directed the poet to diversify his manner, by shewing him in love. No task is harder than that of writing to the ideas of another. Shakespear knew what the Queen, if the story be true, seems not to have known—that by any real passion of tenderness, the selfish craft, the careless jollity, and the lazy luxury of Falstaff must have suffered so much abatement, that little of his former cast would have remained. Falstaff could not love, but by ceasing to be Falstaff. He could only counterfeit love, and his professions could be prompted, not by the hope of pleasure, but of money. Thus the poet approached as near as he could to the work enjoined him; yet having perhaps in the former plays completed his own idea, seems not to have been able to give Falstaff all his former power of entertainment."

Mr. Warren's figure, voice and manner, were very descriptive of the facetious knight; and, on the whole, we were much pleased with the performance.

Shakespear himself could not have wished for a better *Caius* than Blisset; and *Simple*, although a trifling character, received wonderful interest from the artless manner of Bray.

TO SUBSCRIBERS AND CORRESPONDENTS.

The festive season past, and new arrangements made, this work will be continued with increased energy. The Editor's plan is to give sixteen pages on Monday, and eight on Thursday, of every week. The favours of *Grim*, and others, we are under the necessity of deferring till Monday.

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